Panchsheel. Both sides are making efforts for further improving the bilateral relations including measures to expand bilateral trade and enhance bilateral exchanges in various fields. The two sides are in regular contact through diplomatic and non-official channels and at various other levels. Visits of Parliamentarians, people-to-people exchanges, visits of political party delegations and functional exchanges in diverse fields are also taking place. Bilateral trade is growing, and reached US$ 1.92 billion in 1998, representing an increase of 5% over 1997. There remains considerable potential to expand our economic and commercial co-operation.

The Joint Working Group on the Boundary Question, set up in 1988 during the visit of PM Rajiv Gandhi to China, and the Protocol on Foreign Office Consultation, signe during the 10th Meeting of the Joint Working Group held in New Delhi in August 1997, provide a framework for bilateral dialogue. The two sides are scheduled to hold Foreign Office Consultations on 25-26 February 1999 in Beijing. No dates have yet been finalised for the 11th meeting of the Joint Working Group.

Strengthening of Indo-Pak Relations

367. SHRI AKHILESH DAS:
SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) what confidence building measures have been taken between India and Pakistan since the resumption of Secretary level talks between the two countries indicating also the steps for fostering closer people to people relations; and

(b) what further steps are contemplated in this direction?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) and (b) In the lahore Declaration of 21 February 1999, India and Pakistan have agreed to take immediate steps for reducing the risk of accidental or unauthorised use of nuclear weapons, and to take measures for confidence building in the nuclear and conventional field aimed at the prevention of a conflict. The two countries further decided to work towards agreements for advance notification regarding ballistic missile flight tests, and on prevention of incidents at sea in order to ensure safety of navigation by naval vessels and aircraft of the two countries. The two countries also decided to upgrade and make secure and failsafe communication links for example, between the respective Directors General, Military Operations of the two sides, to review implementation of the existing CBMs and to set up a consultative mechanism to monitor and ensure the effective implementation of these CBMs.

During their meeting in Lahore on 20-21 February 1999, the two Prime Ministers decided that consultations will be held between concerned officials to further liberalise the travel and visa regimes between the two countries.

Membership of the UN-Security Council

368. SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA:
SHRI AKHILESH DAS:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Russian Prime Minister during his recent New Delhi visit indicated their support for india's claim to Permanent membership of the U.N. Security Council; if so, in what terms; and

(b) what is the latest position about support to India's claim from various developed and developing countries?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) and (b) The Prime minister of the Russian Federation during his visit to New Delhi in December 1998 described India as "an influential member of the international community" and "a strong and appropriate candidate" for permanent membership of an expanded UN Security Council. There is wide agreement on the need for inclusion of developing countties in any expansion of permanent membership of the UN Security council. However, there is as yet no agreement on the candidates, or criteria.

Nuclear tests by Pakistan

369. SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA:
SHRI AKHILESH DAS:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Govt's attention was drawn to the news-item published in the Times of India dated January 18, 1999, captioned "Are Pak N-arms more dangerous" referring to a CIA revelation that the material used in the nuclear tests by Pakistan in May 1998 contained low levels of weapon grade plutonium; and

(b) if so, how far and in what respect the Nuclear bombs tested by Pakistan were more dangerous or potentially more dangerous?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) Yes Sir.

(b) Nuclear devices, whether based on fission of Uranium or Plutonium, cause the same effect if the yield is identical. However, the CIA revelations, about the possibility of transfer of Plutonium from a third country to Pakistan, if correct, would be a matter of concern.

Safe stay of Mr. Rongthong Dorjee in India

370. SHRI DAWA LAMA: Will the MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government would ensure safe stay or Mr. rongthong Kunley Dorjee in India as a free person; and

(b) whether Government would initiate a dialogue with Bhutan and Nepal to ensure the safe return of people driven out of Bhutan and staying in India?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH):

(a) Judicial proceedings for the extradition of Rongthong Kunley Dorjee are in progress, pursuant to the request made by Royal Government of Bhutan, under Extradition Agreement signed between India and Bhutan in 1996. Mr. Dorjee is on bail while the matter remains sub-judice.

(b) Indian and Bhutanese citizens enjoy the facility of an open border between the two countries. As far as the issue of refugees claiming Bhutanese nationality, staying in Nepal, is concerned, this is being discussed bilaterally betwen Bhutan and Nepal. While Government of India would welcome the resolution of this issue to the mutual satisfaction of Bhutan and Nepal, its considered position is that involvement of any third party will only complicate the matter and make it more intractable.

US Ambassador's remark on India's Nuclear Preparedness

371. SHRI RAGHAVJI:
PROF. VIJAY KUMAR MALHOTRA:

Will the MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether US Ambassador to India has recently questioned India's nuclear preparedness to meet potent threats from